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SUBJECT: SURINAME: NPS TRIES TO SHOW ITS RELEVANCE TO YOUTH VOTERS
AT KICK-OFF ELECTION CAMPAIGN EVENT

Ref: Paramaribo 275

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The National Party of Suriname (NPS), chaired by Ronald Venetiaan, celebrated a combined 63rd anniversary/kick-off election campaign event on September 29, 2009. The large number of youth speakers and youth supporters among the approximately 3,000 people attending the event drew media attention. With 45,790 first-time, youth voters projected for 2010, the NPS is actively showing that despite being considered Suriname's "old" political party, it promotes youth participation in the political field. End Summary.

THE EVENT

¶2. (U) The National Party of Suriname (NPS), chaired by sitting Surinamese President Ronald Venetiaan, held a combined 63rd anniversary/election kick-off event on September 29 at its Grun Djari headquarters. More than 3000 people attended this event despite the bad weather, and many more listened to the speeches on the radio. What made this event remarkable, and drew media attention, was the large youth contingent present at the meeting both as speakers and in the audience. One highlighted youth speaker, Milton Welzijn, chairman of the NPS youth council, made the case that an NPS government would guarantee peace in Suriname -- a major precondition for the stimulation of economic development.

¶3. (U) Another speaker was Minister of Finance, Humphrey Hildenberg, who presented a picture of Suriname with an economy and standard of living on the rise, citing examples such as Suriname's paying off its international debt (however, U.S. debt repayment remains in arrears), paving the Afobakka road (projected to be finished before the November 25 Independence Day celebrations), and programs for private housing construction.

¶4. (U) Finally, President Venetiaan stated that the NPS fully intended to remain in the ruling coalition government. (He did not specifically state that he wanted to remain the New Front coalition's candidate for president, however.) He called upon NPS supporters to put effort into getting enough seats in the 2010 elections for the NPS to form the new government with reliable partners.

¶5. (U) In contrast with NPS anniversary events, none of the chairpersons of the United Reformed Party (VHP), A-Combination (AC), Pertjaja Luhur (PL), Surinamese Labor Party (SPA) or Democratic

Alternative (DA'91) delivered congratulatory messages even though they were in attendance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE YOUTH VOTE

¶6. (U) Robert Ameerali, one of the founding members of the "25 May Committee" (a group of key business and academic leaders that have collaborated since 2005 to analyze Suriname's political landscape and to educate the public on the elections) told Poloff that in 2005, 15 percent (27,635) more people cast votes in the National Assembly elections than had in 2000. Because Suriname's electoral system for the National Assembly is based on 10 Districts and a proportional election system, the impact of the increased voter base, and who voters were supporting, caused significant changes in the balance of power in the country. (Note: While it cannot be identified that it was the new voters that changed the balance of power, it can be determined that there was an influx of new voters and the balance of power between parties was affected.)

¶7. (U) The 2005 election results showed that certain parties increased their voter base significantly. Each party should have grown by 115% in order to maintain the status quo from the 2000 elections. In 2005, opposition parties National Democratic Party (NDP), PALU, and A-Combination coalition (which ran in 2005 as opposition but later joined the New Front ruling coalition in forming a government) increased their voter bases by 204% (24,953 voters), 149%, and 253%, respectively. On the other hand, the New Front coalition received only 99% of the votes it had in 2000 and lost three National Assembly seats as a result. Based on the 2004 census, there will be 45,790 first-time, youth voters in 2010.

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¶8. (SBU) Comment. The NPS focus on youth during its election kick-off event shows that the NPS learned its lesson in 2005 about the impact of the new voters on the voter base. The NPS is actively showing that despite being considered Suriname's "old" political party, it welcomes new blood and youth participation in politics. It is also a clear statement to the opposition, especially after the Bouterse's speech on his plans to turn the National Democratic Party (NDP) over to the youth (Reftel), that the NPS also will be prepared to field younger political candidates in future elections.

Nay